

The Polish “Wild West”. Forced migration and Cultural Appropriation of the Oder Region after 1945

This article presents the migration processes which took place in Poland at the end of the Second World War during its immediate aftermath, along with the consequent near total exchange of population in the Oder region. The issue of how Polish settlers made this new place their home is examined mainly on the basis of an analysis of biographical documents, primarily the so-called “Settlers’ Memoirs”. Moreover, certain examples of this complex process are referred to below.¹

Started by Nazi Germany, the Second World War became an arena not only for ruthless armed conflict but an unprecedented reign of terror concerning civilian populations, along with unimaginable war crimes which culminated in the Holocaust. In the territory of the occupied Polish Second Republic, the German invaders met their Soviet allies shortly after 17 September 1939, when the Red Army crossed Poland’s eastern border. However, during 1941-1945, both the Nazi and Soviet regimes conducted a bloody conflict against each other which, in its final stages, took place in the Oder region and westwards. As a consequence of the defeat of the Third Reich by the Allies a new territorial division of Europe took place, including as part of the deal, the unprecedented shunting of the Polish state from east to west.

As a part of an official propaganda campaign, the regions joined to Poland in 1945 were named the “Recovered Territories”. Although the part of these territories which adjoined the central and lower River Oder was termed officially the “Western Lands”, it was unofficially known as the Polish “Wild West.” As we know, the “Wild West” was a colloquial term for the western regions of the United States during the 19th century which had not yet joined a union resulting from the unification of certain states. This notion was a reflection of the mythical perspective of the Anglo-American conqueror and is, even today, shrouded in legend. Indeed, it is saturated in patriarchic notions of freedom, the rights of the strong, conflicts over property, and similar stereotypes, which led to its mythologization and trivialization.²

¹ The results of this entire project have been presented in German in the following publication: Beata Halicka: „*Polens Wilder Westen*“. *Erzwungene Migration und kulturelle Aneignung des Oderraumes, 1945-1948*. Ferdinand Schöningh Verlag, Paderborn 2013. A Polish-language edition published in Krakow is due to appear in 2015 and is entitled: *Polski Dziki Zachód. Przymusowe migracje i kulturowe osvajanie Nadodrza, 1945-48*. This project has been financed by the Polish-German Foundation for Research.

² Martin Weidinger, *Nationale Mythen – männliche Helden. Politik und Geschlecht im amerikanischen Westen*, Frankfurt am Main 2006.

One may ask how it was that in the mid-20th century a large part of the Oder basin – a region situated in the heart of Europe – took on the unofficial term of the “Wild West”. Moreover, what must have happened for a cradle of human civilization in a region of the “Old Continent” to be termed “wild” two hundred years after the Indian wars in America? How could provinces with once proud-sounding names such as Silesia, Brandenburg and Pomerania, along with cities on the Oder with histories of over a thousand years, have become so devalued? Formulating answers to interpret the consequences of the Second World War seems to be insufficient. These regions became the “Polish Wild West” not only due to the tragic consequences of war but also as a result of nationality policies in the Oder basin which were imposed from the beginning of the 20th century, as well as forced migration, and which were believed to be appropriate preventative measures against ethnic and national conflict. In the Oder region after 1945, as a result of many migration processes which concerned not only Germans and Poles but also other nations and ethnic groups, an almost complete exchange of population occurred.

On the ambivalent notion of “liberation.”

The moment in which the Red Army entered these lands was, for many years, termed by communist propaganda as a “liberation.” Indeed, this event is commemorated as an official ceremony in some, usually small towns and communities in western Poland even today. It is worth, therefore, examining the question as to who was liberated and from what. During the winter of early 1945 this region was inhabited mainly by German civilians, as well as forced laborers from a variety of countries. It is however difficult to acknowledge that such civilians were liberated given that they were brutally robbed, raped and often murdered by Soviet, and sometimes Polish soldiers. Moreover, for over two months in the strip of land along the border, they were chased out of their homes in order to “cleanse” the front line. One may also ask whether German men and women who were able to work and were imprisoned and deported deep into the Soviet interior were liberated. Should the term liberated also include the first Polish so-called “settlers” who, on entering areas following the advancing Red Army west, occupied themselves with looting abandoned and empty properties while simultaneously maintaining dubious interests with Soviet commanders? On the other hand, however, one must state undoubtedly that the Red Army did bring liberation from Nazi oppression not only to forced laborers but to the Germans who, of course, had brought it upon themselves. Even if the most of them had not sought this liberation and related it to a multitude of sufferings, it did liberate Europe from the clutches of Nazism.

The early spring of 1945 is the least researched period in the wartime history of the Oder region. According to Bernadetta Nitschke, over half of the German population fled during late January and early February, while a significant proportion of those who stayed were deported or chased out. Thus, by spring 1945 the area was significantly depopulated and contained forced laborers who had not yet managed, or

did not want to return home.³ Often they had nowhere to which to return and decided to remain in the lands which were to be awarded to Poland, benefiting from a familiarity and knowledge of the region they had gained during their time as forced laborers. Moreover, the region also contained those classified as so-called “displaced persons” such as forced laborers returning from the interior of the Reich, as well as inhabitants of the pre-war Polish borderland who, as the first to enter these “liberated” regions, very often engaged in looting, as well as looking for better living conditions. With time, among these Polish groups another group emerged, later termed “settlement pioneers.” They also strengthened the ranks of real pioneers, i.e. those delegated by the Polish government to set up an administration in the newly-joined territories.

Europe on the move

As the war drew to an end, a process which Eugene Kulischer has termed “Europe on the move”, intensified.⁴ It affected especially the Polish lands which, due to their central location on the European continent, contained at this time millions of people travelling in different directions, a phenomenon which has been presented in an amazingly graphic manner by Grzegorz Hryciuk *et al.*, the authors of *Atlasu ziem Polski. Wypędzenia, wypędzenia i ucieczki. 1939-1959* [The Atlas of Polish Lands: Forced Migrations, Expulsions and Escape. 1939-1959]. The Oder basin was inhabited by demobilized soldiers, as well as the above-mentioned former forced laborers, whom the fledgling Polish administration attempted to encourage to stay on in the region. Moreover, as a result of a propaganda campaign conducted on an growing scale all over Poland, Poles began to move into the region, mainly those who were searching for better living conditions, having lost property, families or jobs during the war. Indeed, it was such people who formed the largest settler group according to a population census from 1950, comprising 48.9% of all settlers.⁵ Recently, however, a widespread myth has grown that the lands joined to Poland were mainly settled by forced migrants from Poland’s eastern marches, the *Kresy*. Nevertheless, according to the 1950 census, the eastern Poles comprised 27.7% of all inhabitants of the newly-joined lands.⁶ Furthermore, the authors of the above-mentioned *Atlas of Polish Lands* state that there were approximately 1,130,000

³ Bernadetta Nitschke, *Wysiedlenie ludności niemieckiej z Polski w latach 1945-49*. Zielona Góra 1999, pp. 222-258.

⁴ Eugene Kulischer, *Europe on the Move. War and population changes 1917-1947*. New York 1948.

⁵ Robert Skobelski, *Ziemie zachodnie i północne w okresie realizacji planu sześcioletniego, 1950-55*. Zielona Góra 2002, p. 33. Patrycy Dzierżyński, *Osadnictwo rolne na Ziemiach Odzyskanych*. Warszawa 1983, p. 253.

⁶ Robert Skobelski, *Ziemie zachodnie i północne w okresie realizacji planu sześcioletniego, 1950-55*. Zielona Góra 2002, p. 33. Patrycy Dzierżyński, *Osadnictwo rolne na Ziemiach Odzyskanych*. Warszawa 1983, p. 253.

people forcibly migrated from the Kresy, approximately 2,900,000 million people who came from other regions of Poland while a further 2 million former prisoners and forced laborers returned to Poland from the west.⁷ The scale of suffering and injury which happened to the eastern Poles, a matter meticulously hushed-up by the communist authorities, has remained a little-known issue up to today. Moreover, the word “repatriate” is still widely used to describe these groups, indicating a lack of reflection or understanding regarding the term.

Settler memoirs as a historical source

For the new inhabitants of the Oder region, the moment of their arrival, confrontation with strangers, and facing life in a depopulated land were all important experiences. The archival documents provide us with information as to how the transport and distribution of people in homes and farms were organized. Knowledge of how these new arrivals felt during their first days there and how they managed in new surroundings is to be found in memoirs written during the early post-war years. Memoirs have a special tradition in Poland regarding competitions first organized in the 1920s. The founder of the social movement concerning memoirs was Professor Florian Znaniecki who first ordered memoirs for the purpose of academic sociological analysis and created the basis of biographical methods. The memoirs which I have analyzed were collected in the wake of the political thaw of 1956 when the Western Institute in Poznań came up with the initiative of the first competition regarding the memoirs of settlers of the “Recovered Territories.”⁸ Written in the spirit of the October 1956 changes, they are characterized by freedom of thought, a critical assessment of reality and an openness in describing mistakes and failures.⁹

These memoirs allow us to discover the enormous variety of experience of the authors which include not only the time and place of settlement but also the motives for settlement, wartime experiences, political views and much else. This is why one may talk here of great ambivalence concerning the feelings and aspirations of those who inhabited these regions. An especially interesting and little-examined period is the so-called “transition phase”, meaning a period in which Poles and Germans lived

⁷ The cited figures only concern the largest settler groups, among whom there were also numerous ethnic minorities which are not more deeply discussed here. Grzegorz Hryciuk (ed.), *et al.* 2008, p. 86.

⁸ Later competitions took place in 1966 and 1970. The texts sent to those competitions were much more dominated by rhetoric full of socialist propaganda, than those from the late 1950s. Selected and censored memoirs appeared in the anthology: Zygmunt Dulczewski, Andrzej Kwilecki, (eds.), *Pamiętniki osadników Ziemi Odzyskanych*. Poznań 1963 i 1970.

⁹ An anthology of uncensored memoirs was recently published in German under my editorship.: Beata Halicka (ed.): *„Mein Haus an der Oder“. Memoiren polnischer Neusiedler in Westpolen nach 1945*. Paderborn 2014. The Polish edition will be published in Kraków in 2016, entitled: *Mój dom nad Odrą. Pamiętniki osadników Nadodrza po 1945 roku*.

under one roof. This forced co-existence of the representatives of two feuding nations ended with the expulsion of the German population which took place in stages.

First, between June and July 1945, there were so-called “wild expulsions” which caused a drastic shortage of labor during the harvest period, as well as in industry. Although later expulsion campaigns took place in more organized circumstances, there was no lack of incidents of abuse, robbery and violence. The outright majority of Germans was expelled beyond the Oder up to the end of 1947.¹⁰ The memoirs of Polish settlers show that the expulsion of the Germans was often glossed over in silence. However, there are incidents of detailed descriptions, both from those involved in expelling Germans and those who did not take an active part in the expulsions. Moreover, in the 1957 memoirs, such people display expressions of anger concerning the brutality of the operations conducted.

Corrections are required regarding statements in older publications that the settlement of the region can be considered to have been completed by 1949, a judgment which served the rationale in justifying the liquidation of the Ministry of the Recovered Territories on 11 January 1950. One must remember that the initial post-war years in Poland witnessed a battle for government power and, as a consequence, a social revolution took place and a communist regime was introduced by force. All of these changes also left a significant impact on the lands joined to Poland in 1945. As to what the social acceptance of these changes was, as well as the attitude new inhabitants of the Oder region had towards propaganda claiming “the settlement has been completed successfully”, one may read in the memoirs. Moreover, one may divide the settlers of the “Western Lands” into three groups depending on their attitude towards the new political situation. In my book, *The Polish Wild West*, I have adopted the following three typologies of people:

- 1) Highly enthusiastic pioneers of the “Recovered Territories”
- 2) Looters, or “resourceful entrepreneurs” of the Polish “Wild West”
- 3) Exhausted war victims and eastern Polish settlers yearning to return home

Highly enthusiastic pioneers of the “Recovered Territories”

In the memoirs published in the 1960s and 1970s, the most commonly represented are those full of the spirit of the pioneers of the “Recovered Territories.” The political aim of their publication was namely, to present the settlement and management of the new lands as a run of success. The most suitable memoirs for this purpose were those of settlers employed in the public services as they frequently endeavored to

¹⁰ Włodzimierz Borodziej, Hans Lemberg (eds), *Niemcy w Polsce 1945–1950*, Vol. I-III. Introduction (pp. 5-23, 37-105, edited documents (pp. 109-374) in Vol. I, Warsaw, 2000-2002.

present the period of their employment in the most positive light, directly or indirectly emphasized their own service, as well as portraying it in the context of a great historical challenge which faced the Polish state. Many Poles, mainly those from central Poland and the province of Wielkopolska who, to a greater or lesser degree, voluntarily decided to settle here, honestly believed in the declared right of Poland to the “Recovered Territories.” This was in accordance with the notion that the Poles had regained these territories after centuries-long sacrifice as an act of historical justice. The Second World War, as well as the German occupation, were seen as the crescendo of a “thousand-year struggle” between Germany and Poland,¹¹ which allowed one to right the balance of the traumatic experience of the past. In exchange, now it was important to settle the “Recovered Territories” with Poles, as well as to “unite them with the motherland”, as Władysław Gomułka stressed during the Days of Polish Culture festival in Wrocław in June 1946. Many settlers therefore believed that this was their patriotic duty, as well as mission in life, and duly wrote their memoirs in the form of reports describing how their task was achieved. For instance, Jerzy Kazimierczuk summed up his memoirs as follows:

“The last Germans left the former Kislinkswalde, Rachanów was born (...) Despite enormous destruction, a lack of livestock, being situated far from towns and lines of communication, the countryside attracted people to settle down through a organized social life and faith that the work of the first settlers would last forever. The school was functioning, a priest was coming, an energetic village leader was conducting his office.”¹²

Both the point of view of the author and the actions which he describes display a significant engagement of the rural inhabitants for whom the period under consideration was a crucial stage in their lives. For many, settling in the Oder region became a turning point in their life story, frequently linked with an awareness of their participation in a historic period for Poland. This is why many attempted in their memoirs to relate their experiences as faithfully and in a detailed manner as possible. The reading of such texts puts it beyond a shadow of a doubt that large numbers of settlers considered their work as a mission fulfilled on behalf of the nation, involving self-sacrifice and not shirking difficulty in order to complete one’s task. For this reason, they emphasize their service, underlining that it concerned the carrying out of pioneering achievements. The social position of the pioneers, thus those who had first settled in particular locations, was set by a number which they received from the State Repatriation Office or from the residency registration office. This number identified their place in the modern history of the region and was seared into their

¹¹ See the political text by Zygmunt Wojciechowski: *Polska – Niemcy. Dziesięć wieków zmagania*, Poznań 1945.

¹² Memoir of Jerzy Kazimierczuk, P 72/1957, Archive of Western Institute, Poznań

memories with pride.¹³ Jan Musekamp draws attention to the fact that during the wave of extolment for the first Polish towns in 1945, a number of them kept the names of those present in the first Operational Groups and who were awarded the same significance as the those were present on the passenger lists of the ships which first brought immigrants to the United States.¹⁴ In both instances these lists of pioneers were used to as the foundations of a “Wild West” myth.

Looters, or “the resourceful entrepreneurs” of the Polish “Wild West”

During the first years of the post-war period, looting was a widespread phenomenon which affected not only the western territories of the reconstituted Polish state, with the problem of plunder plaguing both Germany and other European countries.¹⁵ Due to great movements of populations, as well as the lack of a stable administration, a very specific situation occurred in the Oder region. Indeed, the enormous amount of goods and possessions which had been abandoned by their former owners and left unsupervised could very easily be appropriated by others. Moreover, from a legal standpoint, looting belonged to a “grey area” and was accepted and practiced by the majority of the new Polish society. It became one of the daily activities performed not only by criminals but also respectable people with the best intentions. Employing the example of Wrocław, Gregor Thum has described this phenomenon extensively, one which led to the setting up of a black market on a gigantic scale where foodstuffs from central Poland were exchanged for property from big cities.¹⁶ Virtually in all the memoirs which I have examined, the subject of looting comes up sooner or later. The authors treat it in various ways. In many cases the looting procedure is described in detail, names are sometimes mentioned and it is frequently viewed as the only

¹³ Zygmunt Dulczewski, Andrzej Kwilecki: Introduction,; *Pamiętniki osadników Ziemi Odzyskanych*, Poznań 1970, p. 10.

¹⁴ Compare a ceremony held in 2007 to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the foundation of the Jamestown colony in Virginia. The arrival of three British ships carrying settlers signifies the moment in which English-speaking America, later to become the United States, took root. Jan Musekamp: *Zwischen Stettin und Szczecin. Metamorphosen einer Stadt von 1945 bis 2005*, Wiesbaden 2010, p. 169.

¹⁵ For instance, in Mannheim the number of incidents of theft rose a thousand-fold when compared to figures for 1928. Taken from Wolfgang Jacobmeyer: ‘Problemy ‘displaced persons’ narodowości polskiej w latach 1945–47 na terenie Niemiec’, in *Przegląd Zachodni* 5/6 (1984), pp. 71-103, here p. 78 and later.

¹⁶ Gregor Thum: *Die fremde Stadt. Breslau 1945*, Berlin: Siedler, 2003, Polish edition: *Obce miasto. Wrocław 1945 i potem*. Wrocław 2007. A similar market could be found in Szczecin, compare: Jan Musekamp: *Zwischen Stettin und Szczecin. Metamorphosen einer Stadt von 1945 bis 2005*, Wiesbaden 2010, p. 82; Polish edition: *Między Stettinem a Szczecinem. Metamorfozy miasta 1945-2005*, Poznań 2013. Józef Kijowski: ‘Wspomnienia z pobytu w Szczecinie w 1945 r.’, part 2, in: *Przegląd Zachodniopomorski* 6[35], 4 (1991), pp. 171-197, here p. 182 and later, (an account from 1960).

possible way out of a very difficult general situation.¹⁷ However, in it is usual in memoirs written from the perspective of about a decade later, not only looting but the people who practiced it as a profession, were portrayed as a plague and the greatest evil of the initial post-war years. Indeed, the economic destruction wreaked by looters was enormous.¹⁸ It was carried out, to a significant degree, not only to the detriment of quickly rebuilding the Oder region but also to that of the new settlers. Thus, especially in the memoirs of the so-called pioneers of the “Recovered Territories” one may find numerous descriptions of how they personally tried to oppose the looters or accounts of failed attempts by the police or administration to stop them.

Looters undoubtedly belong to these groups of new inhabitants of the Oder region who found themselves well-off in difficult initial conditions. In fact, it was no longer than two or three years before most of those involved in such activities ended up in prison or were forced to flee in order to save themselves. For others, however, looting created a material basis of a new life which stabilized with time.

Exhausted war victims and eastern Polish settlers yearning to return home

From spring 1945 refugees from the eastern borderlands of Poland began to live in the Oder region. They had endured a journey of several weeks in freight wagons, often having already suffered the trauma of the Soviet and German occupations, as well as the Polish-Ukrainian civil war. On their arrival at their destination most of them found themselves in a state of culture shock. Depending on their physical and emotional state of well being, they found their place in their new environment and began to engage with it, albeit at different tempos. However, this was not characteristic to all, with some seeing no need to go beyond the closest physiological and safety boundaries. Such people shut themselves away in their private life, isolated themselves from others, thereby losing the possibility of satisfying their need for recognition, social contact or self-development. Frequently, this had a negative impact of their health with some sitting on their unpacked suitcases for years afterwards or reliving the trauma of war.

In Polish memoirs from the late 1940s and 1950s it is difficult to find accounts concerning such human tragedies. Indeed, they did not suit the ethos of the settler whose was meant to be actively involved with the resettlement and economic growth of the Oder region. Although it is true that criticism of shortages, deficiencies, mistakes and failed projects was tolerated (even if this criticism was not always published), it was rare, however, that someone presented this from the point of view of victimhood. Even those who did not have any of their own heroic activities to write

¹⁷ For instance, the memoirs of Stanisław Jędrzejowski, P 10/1957, Jan Bratek P 42/1957, Zbigniew Żaba, P 81/1957, p. 63 and later, or Piotr Kasproicz, P 91/1957, p. 48 and later.

¹⁸ Philipp Ther, *Deutsche und polnische Vertriebene. Gesellschaft und Vertriebenenpolitik in der SBZ/DDR und in Polen 1945–1956*, Göttingen 1998, p. 127.

about attempted to portray themselves as the guardians of certain ideals, moral values, as well as a peculiar life philosophy. The role of the victim only appeared in the context of Nazi war crimes which were recalled with the sole aim of justifying claims for compensation or explaining certain deeds. The authors of the memoirs sent to the Western Institute in Poznań did not write (or wrote only indirectly) about their own suffering, longing for home, apathy or the life which they had lost. The small number of marginal references to family members or friends tells us that these people could find their place among the new settlers. The positions of victims or those defeated appears significantly more often in subsequent memoirs, mainly in texts from the 1990s and later. One may explain this by the greater time gap between the authors and the events described, as well as the influence which came from the memoirs of German refugees and expellees who often wrote from such a perspective.

For this reason, in my research I was forced to seek out written memoirs published in the late 1990s. As an example, we may look at the friends and family of Wanda Witter who was forced to leave her home on the River Niemen in present-day Lithuania. During the German occupation her husband was taken prisoner and sent to a concentration camp near Munich. During the Soviet occupation, many families who had been reduced in size through war had to leave their homes forever, while a number of them would be deported to Siberia. Wanda Witter, however, was therefore somewhat lucky in that the decision to resettle them to the “Recovered Territories”, despite everything, was greeted with a sigh of relief. At the same time, she left her homeland with a great sense of pain, while fearing and worrying about how she and her five children (three of whom were very small) would survive the journey and manage in a new place, impoverished and carrying few possessions. On arrival in Lubsko in Krosno county she endured many unpleasant experiences while seeking accommodation. Eventually, the family occupied a heavily-damaged building and received papers from the Settler Office allowing them to live there. The house itself was in a derelict state with a ground floor devoid of any window panes, the ceiling threatening to collapse, a leaking portable stove, while that winter the family slept in unheated rooms. There was a shortage of everything. The older children, however, quickly learned how to “organize” essential items while the eldest son soon found work, thereby ensuring basic food provisions for the family. At the same time, the mother, while getting the house into a state fit for human habitation, suddenly fell ill:

“Completely alone, with the feeling that everyone around me was rejecting me, I decided to give myself up as the prey of misery. To give up. Not to fight anymore. Not to worry about anything ever again. Give myself over to fate, even if it meant sending me to hell.”¹⁹

¹⁹ Wanda Witter, ‘Horyzont nostalgii’, in Hans-Jürgen Bömelburg, Renate Stößinger, Robert Traba (eds): *Wypędzeni ze Wschodu. Wspomnienia Polaków i Niemców*. Olsztyn 2001, pp.260-273, here 266, 271.

She became seriously ill and it was not until several weeks later that she was able to leave her bed. Thanks to the help of her children, as well as a fellow Polish woman from the east who, despite difficulties, had been able to cope better, the family managed to get through this trying time. Wanda Witter lived on in the hope that her husband would return and would bring the family home to the east:

“I did not reproach anyone for the poverty which enveloped us at home. Actually it took a weight off my mind as it meant that we had not taken property which was not ours and with a clear conscience could return home. Home! I had waited so long for this. People say that the Germans will recover, rise from defeat and return in order to regain their property.”²⁰

In order to overcome the shock caused by the changes and frequently traumatic experiences, as well as find a convincing explanation for their new situation, people required new myths which would help them understand the world, justify the presence of Poles along the Oder, get used to their new place and learn to treat it as a small homeland. Due to its negative connotations, the widespread use of the term “Wild West” for the Oder region was not suitable for the new foundation myth promoted by the communist government. During the first months following the war, people were encouraged to settle the new lands by depicting it as a great adventure and the area to be settled as a country of unlimited possibilities and vast wealth. The romantic vision of journeying to the “Wild West” appealed to mainly to young people who had nothing to lose and quickly decided to move. Regarding the development of settlement in Polish society, the belief was circulated more and more that in the case of the newly-joined regions, it was not so much a romantic “Wild West”, a land of unlimited possibilities, but more a hotbed of criminality and chaos in which the strong dominated the weak. Naturally, the popularization of this view did not serve the interests of the Polish government. This is why it was decided to employ a different already-functioning myth of the “Recovered Territories, one created on the basis of the official name of the region.

To sum up, one must state that the so-called memoirs to order, meaning those written for memoir competitions, were consciously employed as an instrument of socialist social policy. Apart from memoirs which were published in a censored form, those which were denied publication due to their overly critical contents deserve particular attention. However, even in these texts one can detect self-censorship which prevented discussion of certain topics, such as the bewailing of the homeland lost in the east. In being aware of this limitations, one must however recognize the examined memoirs as a valuable testament left for subsequent generations and as a form of accustoming memory. In such a way this process, on the one hand, was a chance for independent reflection on the new homeland and, on the other, the scrupulous selection of texts of the memoirs chosen for publication in an anthology

²⁰ Witter: ‘Horyzont nostalgii’, p. 272.

allowed the editors to create an appropriate image of this region. This was meant to facilitate the inhabitants in learning about the modern history of the area, appreciating its specific nature and value, as well as strengthening their identification with it. Memory of these initial post-war years, the difficulty of reconstruction and the creation of a new society allowed the new inhabitants (often after two or three generations) to put down their own roots.